

# Committee on Resources

## Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands

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### Witness Statement

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TESTIMONY OF KRISTEN MCDONALD  
WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS PROGRAM ASSOCIATE  
AMERICAN RIVERS, INC.  
ON H.R. 3520  
BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
NATIONAL PARKS AND PUBLIC LANDS,  
HOUSE COMMITTEE  
ON RESOURCES  
June 8, 2000

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 3520, a bill to designate White Clay Creek in Delaware and Pennsylvania as an addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. My name is Kristen McDonald, and I am the Wild and Scenic Rivers Program Associate for American Rivers. Since its founding in 1973, American Rivers has worked with our grassroots partners to protect rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and has actively assisted federal agencies, states and local groups with river conservation efforts. American Rivers is a 31,000-member organization committed to the protection and restoration of the nation's outstanding rivers.

I would like to commend Congressman Pitts for introducing H.R. 3520, to designate 191 miles of White Clay Creek and its tributaries in northwestern Delaware and southeastern Pennsylvania for addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. White Clay Creek is a remarkably undeveloped river. Easily accessible to residents of the New-York-Philadelphia-Baltimore-Washington corridor, White Clay Creek offers a unique wild and scenic river experience. The nomination of White Clay Creek as a candidate for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System is a result of over ten years of broad local interest and involvement, leading to consensus for the designation and agreement upon a management plan that relies heavily on existing land use authorities.

The resources of White Clay Creek are nationally significant and strikingly diverse. The Creek flows through rolling farms, wooded areas, suburbs, and small towns and empties into Delaware's Christina River, which flows into the Delaware River. It offers many opportunities for recreation and enjoyment of scenic beauty. In fact, it supports 21 native species of fish and is Delaware's premier trout stream, famous for its brown and rainbow trout. Almost 50,000 fish are stocked in the stream during the spring. Fly-fishing is very popular, especially on opening day in the spring.

Minnows, daces, shiners, and chubs also thrive in the clear, clean water. Eastern bluebirds and broad-winged hawks fly among the massive beech and oak trees. The White Clay Creek area also supports a variety of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, and is home to the bog turtle, which has been listed by the Fish and Wildlife Service as a threatened species. In addition to supporting healthy wildlife populations, the watershed contains rich and diverse plant life.

The pastoral landscape of White Clay Creek offers a variety of recreational activities, including hiking, skiing, picnicking, and bird watching. Important historic sites abound in the watershed, and it is a major source of drinking water. I also recently had the occasion to visit White Clay Creek; walking along the creek through rolling farms and quiet, wooded groves lent an experience of traveling through time to witness a type of eastern landscape that is rapidly disappearing.

In 1991, citizens along White Clay Creek became increasingly concerned about the population impacts on the health of the watershed, and they wanted to investigate the option of wild and scenic river designation. In response, Congress amended the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (P.L. 90-542) to authorize a study of White Clay Creek and its tributaries for possible inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, and to direct the NPS to develop a management plan for the river. Since that time, numerous public meetings, surveys, and other local leadership efforts have shaped and refined the management plan and wild and scenic river proposal.

The study determined that White Clay Creek is both eligible and suitable for designation in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The resulting two-tier management plan effectively addresses both the importance and preference of local leadership, and the need for the additional protection offered through the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Existing authorities will play primary roles in protecting the wild and scenic river, through the formation of the White Clay Creek Watershed Management Committee. The NPS will administer the wild and scenic river in partnership with the Committee, and ensure that federal water resources projects will not degrade the river's free flowing character or the values for which it is designated.

The watershed's fifteen municipalities, the two counties, and the city of Newark, Delaware have passed resolutions in support of the management plan and the designation. In addition to the segments totaling 191 miles included in the proposed designation, American Rivers supports the designation of Churchman's Marsh, Lamborn Run, and the properties on which the intake structures and pipelines for the proposed Thompson's Station Reservoir shall be located, if at a later date they are no longer required to meet the planning needs of the Delaware River Basin Commission.

White Clay Creek has special values that are particularly unique for its location within a densely populated region, and it is worthy of inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The widespread local support for this river protection measure reflects a long, careful process of public involvement in creating the management plan and ensuring support for the designation. American Rivers enthusiastically supports this kind of local effort to protect and enhance river values, and we are pleased to recommend the designation of White Clay Creek as an addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. We also commend the leadership of Congressman Pitts in taking this next critical step toward protection of this natural treasure for future generations.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of H.R. 3520.

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